


Community Engagement: A Powerful Tool in Combating Ebola


Guest post by Saran Kaba Jones, Founder and CEO of [FACE Africa](#)

Join Saran Kaba Jones for a Facebook #YALICHAT starting Tuesday, December 16. You can submit your questions until Thursday, December 18. Post your questions on Facebook or tweet your questions to @YALINetwork and include #YALICHAT.

FACE Africa team joins together. Photo  courtesy Keiko Hiromi.

Five years ago I began the journey that is today [FACE Africa](#). In that time, with the support of our team and the communities we work with and serve, we have been able to bring safe water to over 20,000 people in some of the most deprived areas of Liberia, with many more projects to come.


But the unprecedented Ebola outbreak in West Africa has presented a new set of challenges that has required the FACE Africa team to redirect our efforts. Ebola has had a devastating impact on the lives of people already struggling to rebuild from the effects of political instability, poverty and war. In addition to the suffering of infected individuals and their families, the disease has caused disruptions in normal daily life, from school and business closings, to disrupted trade and economic activity, rising food prices, an increase in fatalities from treatable illnesses due to the closure of non-Ebola health clinics and —most devastatingly — over 3,700 orphaned children in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, according to UNICEF.

Community works together to install a  well in rural Liberia. Photo courtesy Keiko Hiromi.

At FACE Africa, we believe that engagement is the pathway to empowerment, and when communities are empowered to take control of a situation for themselves, you see meaningful change. They may not have all the expertise, but they have the ability to learn, take charge and even put in place their own solutions. Building on our track record of community engagement and trust developed over many years, the FACE Africa team is working with local communities in Liberia to develop and implement a response strategy with the overall aim of preventing the further spread of the virus. Our team has been working hard on social mobilization and awareness — helping communities understand the outbreak and the protective measures they can take to reduce human infection and death while reducing fear and misconceptions about the virus.

Fear is a powerful emotion. It can make even the most reasoned person abandon good judgment and common sense. It is possible that the fear around Ebola stems from the difficulty in fighting it — there is neither a cure nor a vaccine. But we know for a fact that there are thousands of Ebola patients who have been successfully treated and discharged from treatment centers. As Africans, we need to tell these success stories. By telling these stories we can reduce the level of stigma that survivors have to contend with when they return to their communities. Survivors of Ebola are a

beacon of hope in an otherwise shattering epidemic.

FACE Africa team joins community  leaders for discussion in Liberia. Photo courtesy Keiko Hiromi.

Let us celebrate the local everyday heroes, risking their lives to care for patients or bury the dead. We need to recognize the communities that are taking charge, especially in rural areas, and putting in place their own resolutions and protective measures. The eradication of Ebola will only happen through education, community involvement and the aggressive efforts of African and international organizations. All of those whose lives have been impacted by Ebola deserve our respect and compassion, not to be ostracized and excluded from society.

The Founder and CEO of [FACE Africa](#), Saran Kaba Jones, is currently in Liberia assisting communities in the fight against Ebola. FACE Africa is a community development organization working to build and strengthen water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure and services.

The views and opinions expressed here belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the YALI Network or the U.S. government.

[YALI Network's Virtual Maker Faire](#)

YALI Network members are working to solve existing challenges in their communities in creative, innovative ways. Here are a few great examples of what you can do in your communities, from mobile charging to tech training and solar panel installation. [Read more](#) about the maker movement around Africa.

Here are some highlights from Maker Faire Africa in December 2014:

[\[View the story "Maker Faire Africa" on Storify\]](#)

[Childhood Illness Inspires Nigerian to Malaria Action](#)


Oluwamayowa Salu, a YALI Network member from Nigeria, founded the Iba [Yoruba word for malaria] Eradication Foundation and organizes malaria prevention and education efforts in Lagos

and the surrounding areas.

“Malaria kills and we need to stop it.”

Sub-Saharan Africa suffers more cases of malaria each year than any other world region, mostly among children under 5 years of age, according to the World Health Organization. However, the toll of malaria is on the decline and deaths in the region are down almost 50 percent. Work of groups such as the Iba Eradication Foundation are key to that decline.

Oluwamayowa Salu shares his experiences and advice for other young leaders interested in starting similar disease-prevention campaigns in this interview.

A World Malaria Day program in Lagos  featured a bed net distribution. Pictured are Lagos U.S. Consul General Jeffery Hawkins, USCG Lagos' Deepa Sipes, Oluwamayowa Salu, and Ojosipe Bimbo. Photo courtesy O. Salu.

Question: Why are you interested in malaria prevention?

Salu: I grew up in one of the dirtiest places in Lagos — the commercial capital of Nigeria — called Bariga. It's mostly swampy, and this definitely meant lots of mosquitoes [the carriers of the disease-causing parasite].

My elder brother and I used to hide under a tattered mosquito net, but I still ended up with malaria again and again. I landed in hospitals many times to be treated for malaria instead of being in school. I lost some of my primary school years.


Because of this experience, I grew up saying I would do something about malaria, thus I founded my organization. I am awestruck to find out later that malaria kills a child every second. I am a lucky one to have survived the disease.

Q: How did you get the Iba Eradication Foundation started?

I started with material support from some organizations and I used my very small salary to support my organization till I gained some traction and recognition. I wrote proposals and letters to Exxon Mobil, Lagos State health agencies, Red Cross International and so many others. Our awards and seed grants also helped us move forward.

To implement our projects, we have worked in many communities and partner with the local nongovernmental organizations, youth associations and community development organizations. So we get lots of volunteers from there and we have been able to build a huge database. We also make use of social media to recruit volunteers.

Q: The Iba Foundation has distributed insecticide-treated bed nets, a key measure to avoid nighttime mosquito bites, which can cause infection. How do Lagos citizens adapt to bed nets?

Keeping a neighborhood clean and  eliminating mosquito breeding places is a key part of the malaria eradication strategy.
Photo courtesy O. Salu.

Salu: There are some difficulties in the use of bed nets. This stems from the average size of a Lagos family, and the size of the house they inhabit. About four or five people might sleep in one room, so it becomes very inconvenient and difficult to use these nets. We have large-size nets, but using them may mean poor ventilation. Then, with Nigeria's power problem, there is often no electricity to power the fans for air circulation. So people prefer to sleep without the nets and bear the consequences.

Some people believe malaria is already part of our DNA, so there is no use sleeping under the nets. If you fall ill once every three or six months, that is the way of life. You walk into a pharmacy and buy some drugs to treat the illness. Many Nigerians believe that curing malaria is easier than preventing malaria.

But bed nets are only one of the methods of preventing mosquito bites. Convincing people to adopt these practices depends on using many behavioral communication tools.

We discovered lots of people muddle things up about malaria. Because of the very sharp rise in use of smartphones, we decided to create apps that can educate, inform and communicate behavioral change to people. Apps can be downloaded and accessed by anybody, anywhere, so they are faster than the use of pamphlets or town hall meetings. I have seen lots of malaria mobile apps developed by young people, and I have even developed one.

Comic books are another information tool we are working on. Children are the age group most affected, but I found that local education curriculum offers just two or three lines about mosquitoes and malaria. That is very bad.

With comics, you can create a generation that knows what to do and that will grow up with the right information about the disease. At Iba Foundation, our first malaria comic book publication will be in English language but our aim is to have it translated in many languages. Nigeria has over 250 tribes, and other sub-Saharan African countries are affected by the disease, so our work is well cut out for us. We will do it.

Q: How can other members of the YALI network become involved in disease-prevention education?

Salu: We need to innovate beyond use of bed nets. Malaria kills, and we need to stop it. I have read about what young people all over Africa are doing about educating people about malaria, but I think the very first step is to educate people about keeping the environment sparkling, spotlessly clean, and eliminating the conditions that allow mosquitoes to breed. This is why environmental sanitation is central to our malaria eradication efforts.

Q: How have you seen bed net distribution and other educational activities improve practices and reduce disease in Lagos?

Salu: Bed net distribution has really reduced the disease drastically. Through the support of

organizations like the U.S. President's Malaria Initiative, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Exxon Mobil's Malaria Initiative, the Roll Back Malaria Partnership and a working synergy between local government and NGOs, bed net distribution has reached lots of low-income families, and villages too.

For example, I have slept under a mosquito net every night for years now, and I have also helped distribute them through my organization to thousands of people. Malaria is becoming history for bed net users like me. We also collect data before and after our net distribution programs, and the impact has been remarkable. We did some research after one campaign and found that our educational programs helped reduce the number of malaria cases in one community by 45 percent.

Q: Do you find other young adults like yourself are generally aware of malaria prevention techniques, or do more YALI Network members need to help spread the message?

Salu: I am knowledgeable about malaria because it has affected me and I am passionate about ending it, but a lot of people are still very ignorant on how to avoid it. Some believe not staying under the sun, not overworking and avoiding eating bad food will reduce possibility of getting malaria, but those things are not true.


We definitely need more YALI Network members to spread the message, and we will be glad to incorporate interested YALI Network members into it.

At Iba Foundation, we are already looking at forming a youth malaria alliance all over sub-Saharan Africa. We know there are young people all over the sub-Saharan African region who have been affected by the disease in one way or the other and are very passionate to end it. We know young people have ideas and innovations to implement locally that could "fast-track" eradication of the disease. The alliance could offer them a platform to develop those ideas. We are hoping to start small and spread out, with support from both local and foreign organizations, of course.

Inspiring Community Health Volunteerism

Isaac Ampomah believes that everyone deserves good health. That's why in 2002 the social entrepreneur and health educator founded the nonprofit [Concern Health Education Project](#) in the La Dade-Kotopon municipality of Accra, Ghana.

"I started Concern to ensure effective community participation in health care and to act as a mouthpiece for the vulnerable," he said.

Concern Health Education volunteers 
teach Ghanaians how they can prevent

the spread of tuberculosis. Photo Courtesy of Isaac Ampomah.

Ampomah, 36 years old and a YALI Network member, recruits and trains volunteers to deliver disease-prevention messages to people living in low-income, overcrowded neighborhoods. Homes in these areas frequently are poorly ventilated, posing a risk for the spread of tuberculosis (TB). Poor sanitation facilities and a lack of clean water around these homes contribute to the spread of other preventable diseases like cholera, malaria and hepatitis, Ampomah said.


So far, Ampomah has trained 120 volunteers to visit homes and talk to residents about the importance of hand-washing, good hygiene and proper food handling. They look for people who exhibit symptoms of TB and refer them to local health centers for free screenings and, if necessary, free treatment.

“Their counseling techniques go a long way to getting people to the centers,” Ampomah said.

Volunteers also visit TB patients to ensure they follow through on the long course of daily medications needed to cure TB. They protect patient privacy as they engage community members to reduce the stigma of TB. They encourage pregnant women and people in other vulnerable groups being treated for TB to get tested for HIV.

To reach as many people as possible, Concern also uses posters, television and radio to heighten public awareness about the disease and its transmission.

Concern’s efforts are supported by Ghana’s national TB control program, which distributes grants from the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and by business and individual donors, Ampomah said. He added that he even takes on added jobs to cover Concern’s operating costs. With more funding, the group could reach even more communities, he said.

Concern Health Education volunteers  give a man TB and HIV leaflets and advise him to be tested. Photo Courtesy of Isaac Ampomah.

Ampomah recruits health-education volunteers from the communities he visits. “Volunteers are inspired to be involved in finding TB cases,” he said. “They can choose which projects they want to work on. They are young and old and represent different cultures. They have the passion to assist the community. They see their service as humanitarian.”

At the end of every project Concern recognizes each volunteer with a health education award.

Ampomah’s parents encouraged him to go to school and to help others. In addition to health and volunteer management, Ampomah has studied human rights, climate change and local government management, he said.

On YALI and Leadership

“I see YALI as a platform for sharing stories,” Ampomah said. “Through this medium, I am confident


I will achieve my long-term goal of exchanging learning experiences with stakeholders and international volunteers.”

This Ghanaian native also advises YALI members to have confidence in pursuing their goals. “Do not underestimate your dreams. Put them on paper and develop them in the form of a vision. Then share that with other people who share your ideas and dreams,” Ampomah said.

Given his own experience in founding and leading the Concern Health Education Project, Ampomah suggests similar activities as a means toward personal growth for others. “My advice for other YALI Network members is to become a volunteer in your community and lead a social program. This can be with TB or Ebola prevention education. All youth leaders must show compassion for all persons affected by disease,” he said.

Have you joined #HealthyUg yet? Take our quiz and learn more at yali.state.gov/health.

Enthusiasm Is a Starting Point for Better Health

Dr. Sandrine Talla is a general  practitioner in Cameroon. Courtesy of Dr. Sandrine Talla.

Individuals can make a big impact on the health of their communities by mobilizing groups to address specific issues. For example, if you believe that there should be more awareness of HIV/AIDS, you could organize a community health screening event. Dr. Sandrine Talla, a general practitioner and HIV/AIDS clinical manager at Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Services, offers her advice to the YALI Network on how to mobilize community members and leaders around such events.

Question: What resources does one need to mobilize a community health screening?

Talla: I believe that the greatest resource to achieve anything in life is your enthusiasm and vision. After that, other things fall into place. These include:

- Human resources, that is, people who can serve as counselors and help perform the tests. A few volunteers with the same drive will do. HIV in Africa is still associated with a lot of stigma and a lot of misconceptions. People need to be properly counseled before and after they undergo an HIV screening test (this is called pre- and post-test counseling) and linked to care appropriately.
- Material resources, and that means posters for health education, screening test kits and other testing accessories. Sometimes, visual aids such as a computer, a projector or flip charts will help to enhance the presentation and improve audience understanding.

- Finally, you need financial resources for logistics.

Q: Tell the YALI Network more about the power of enthusiasm.

Talla: Enthusiasm helps you generate inner strength to move on even in the face of challenges. Enthusiasm is contagious. One's enthusiasm will provoke others to be interested in the work, and obstacles become steppingstones. This is what I meant by "other things falling in place." Some people may not support your vision, but with enough enthusiasm, you will be able to carry on.

Q: How do you win support from community leaders?

Talla: The first thing is to identify that there is a need for people to know their HIV status and to access medical care. Once this is done, it is always important to start with those around you, that is, friends and families who might support the work you are doing.

Then, identify the leaders of the community. Discussing these needs with the leaders first and engaging them in finding solutions will go a long way to stir up enthusiasm and support for your program.

My pastor at my local church first brought up the idea that I should educate church members about HIV/AIDS. Church leaders gave me a lot of encouragement and financial support that you need to run such activities.

We always do the disease screening free, not only for HIV, but also for some other diseases, such as hepatitis, diabetes and others. When the service is free, more people will get tested.

I intend to launch into neighboring churches when I am back home after my fellowship.

Q: HIV/AIDS is a serious international problem, but what actions can individuals take to help their communities?

Talla: An individual can do a lot in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic:

- Get involved in educating the community about the disease, starting with families and friends, with emphasis on mode of transmission, prevention and treatment. Nelson Mandela reminded us that "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."
- Create a platform where myths and misconceptions about HIV can be corrected. Misconceptions around HIV/AIDS remain, especially in Africa. They prevent people from getting tested or even seeking care.
- Encourage parents to start sex education at home. It is still a taboo to discuss sex at the family level. This makes children get and act on wrong information, which they pick haphazardly.
- Advocate for formal education of the girl child.
- Empower the most vulnerable groups, such as women and girls.
- Organize HIV screening activities outside health care settings to do away with stigma of hospital-based testing.
- Show love and concern to those who are already sick.


Have you joined #HealthyUg yet? Take our quiz and learn more at yali.state.gov/health.

Dr. Talla is studying at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2014 as a Humphrey Fellow,

sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. As a Humphrey Fellow, Dr. Talla is focused on health policy improvement and coordination, monitoring and evaluation of health programs, and implementation of effective public health programs, specifically as they relate to HIV/AIDS.

How to Create a Community Health Awareness Campaign

Creating a health awareness campaign is an effective way to prevent the spread of diseases affecting your community. For example, community members can help prevent

This young Cameroonian spreads the  message that “AIDS is REAL” in his community.

Credit: Peace Corps

HIV transmission and create positive environments for people already infected by the virus by spreading the right information throughout the community. Here are some tips on planning an awareness campaign in your community.

- Work with respected community members to plan and conduct the awareness campaign, including local decision makers, religious leaders, traditional healers, midwives and other individuals in the health care field.
- Identify existing community groups and institutions working on the topic you want to address. Learn about the work they already are doing that could contribute to your campaign and assess their reputation in the community to decide if they can contribute positively to your campaign.
- Find out how people learn and to whom they listen. Find out what motivates the intended audience and what is important to them. How are health messages best conveyed? Who conveys them? Is a radio campaign a good idea to spread information?
- Use interpersonal communication to reinforce messages communicated through mass media. If you do organize a radio campaign, adding a person-to-person exchange of information can make a great deal of difference in how people remember and internalize the messages you want to communicate.
- Expect and accept initial resistance by community leaders and allow them to engage in conversation with you on their own terms. Avoid confrontation. However, you can support those who, in their efforts to affect change, may be willing to push the edge of social norms.

If you are creating an HIV/AIDS-focused awareness campaign, keep the following tips in mind:

- Identify perceptions of HIV/AIDS. How do people talk about HIV/AIDS and other sexual issues? Are people comfortable talking directly about sexual issues or do they talk about them indirectly? How susceptible do people believe themselves to be to AIDS? What are the beliefs about who gets AIDS? Knowing the answers to these questions can help you best shape your campaign.
- Use positive motivational messages. HIV/AIDS needs to be seen as a disease relevant to everyday life. Fear-based messages demonize those affected and are less likely to change behaviors.

Have you joined #HealthyUg yet? Take our quiz and learn more at yali.state.gov/health.

Adapted from information contained in the Peace Corps booklet [HIV/AIDS: Integrating Prevention and Care into Your Sector](#).

[#YALIHonors Nelson Mandela](#)

YALI Network members share messages in memory of the one year anniversary of Nelson Mandela's passing.

[[View the story "#YALIHonors Nelson Mandela" on Storify](#)]

[What You Should Know About Preventing HIV Infection](#)

Many YALI Network members are working to raise community awareness of HIV/AIDS prevention. Health practitioners everywhere agree on the following basic disease facts that the public must understand to prevent the spread of HIV.

Stop AIDS in Africa symbol



Credit: AP Images

• **How is HIV Spread?**

The spread of HIV from person to person is called HIV transmission.

HIV is spread through contact with the blood, semen, pre-seminal fluid, vaginal fluids, rectal fluids or breast milk of a person infected with HIV.

HIV is spread by having unprotected sex or by sharing drug equipment, such as needles, with someone who has HIV.

HIV can pass from an infected woman to her child during pregnancy, childbirth (labor and delivery), or breastfeeding. This is called mother-to-child transmission.

Some HIV infections have occurred after a blood transfusion or organ transplant from an HIV-infected donor. This risk has diminished with widespread screening.

Handshakes, hugs and friendly kisses will not transmit HIV. Objects such as toilet seats, doorknobs or dishes used by a person infected with HIV will not transmit the disease.

• **How to Reduce the Risk of Getting HIV**

Get tested before you have sex. Know your partner's HIV status and ask that he or she be tested.

Use a condom every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex. Use condoms correctly.

Have less risky sex. Oral sex is less risky than anal or vaginal sex.

Limit your number of sexual partners. Get tested regularly and get treated for any sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Insist that your partners do too. Having an STI can increase your risk of becoming infected with HIV.

Talk to your health care provider about pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, a prevention option for people who are at high risk of getting HIV. It's meant to be used consistently, as a pill taken every day, and to be used with other prevention options such as condoms.

Don't take intravenous drugs. If you do, use only sterile injection equipment and clean water. Never share your equipment with others.

• **Prevention of Mother-to-Child HIV Transmission (MTCT)**

Pregnant HIV-infected women take HIV medicines during pregnancy and childbirth to reduce the risk of passing HIV to their babies. Their newborn babies also receive HIV medicine for 6 weeks after birth. The medicine reduces the risk of infection from HIV that may have entered the baby's body during childbirth.

A thorough campaign of MTCT prevention through wide distribution of HIV medicines is key to the goal of reaching an AIDS-free generation.

• **Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)**

PEP is the use of HIV medicine to reduce the risk of HIV infection after a possible exposure to the virus. PEP may be used after a person has unprotected sex with an infected person or after a health care worker is accidentally exposed to HIV in the workplace. To be effective, PEP must be started within three days of the possible exposure to HIV.


Have you joined #HealthyUg yet? Take our quiz and learn more at yali.state.gov/health.

Information provided by [AIDSinfo](#), a service of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Ethiopian's Invention Leads to Business Success

"I believe perseverance will lead one to triumph."

YALI Network member Biruk Girma Bedane entered the security alarm business in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, after a disaster in his first business. In search of a solution, Bedane took the initiative to turn the situation around by creating an invention that would help other Ethiopians avoid the same disaster. With innovation, creativity and dedication, Bedane built BG Electric and Security System Enterprise.

At an Information Communication Technology exhibition,  Biruk Girma Bedane introduces government ministers to the security device he invented.

Credit: Courtesy photo

How did you enter the security alarm business?

Bedane: I was motivated to invent and create a new kind of security system after an incident of burglary I encountered. My wife and I ran a shop, which was a game center and a movie-rental service. This shop was looted by our own guard, who used a similar key to get in and took every item we had.

After the robbery, I looked for a security device I could use to prevent such incidents. However, I could not find a system that suited my interests and my budget. I decided to do it myself. It took me two years to make the device, but I did so.

I've been tinkering with circuits and machines since I was a boy. My parents allowed me to work in a mechanic's garage when I was only 14 years old. I was at school half the day, and at the garage the rest of the day, learning electrical installation in vehicles and electrical maintenance. The skills I developed then have helped me quite considerably for work today.

Describe your business today.

Bedane: The BG electrical security system is used to secure households, businesses, fences and vehicles. When the alarm is disturbed by an intruder, the system 1) dials or texts to the client's phone number or 2) triggers an alarm sound or light in the premises.

This product and service is registered by the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ethiopian Intellectual Property Office, and I have been granted two certificates of patent rights.

Bedane works on preparing an alarm for installation.



Credit: Courtesy photo

What were some of the challenges you had to overcome in building BG Electric and Security System Enterprise?

Bedane: Transforming my plan into practical implementation was a serious challenge.

I had a shortage of knowledge, so I attended a private electronics school for six months' training on maintenance of electronics.

I had lots of other startup problems: shortages of work space, materials to build components and a lack of financing. I didn't have office furniture and tools, working clothes, raw materials, or encouragement from individuals and government offices. People rejected my proposals and looked down on my plans.

With my own business plan, over about three years, I managed to overcome the problems and become a success story for myself and others.

Presently, my enterprise has increased its capital to 1.5 million birr [almost \$75,000 U.S.], and I am preparing to transfer the enterprise to a middle-level industry. We have now eight salaried employees working with us. I have recruited experts of business plan research and I am about to apply for an investment license. I will also apply for additional loan and a work site.

I am providing trainings to other young people at my work site.

How would you advise others who want to turn an idea into a business?

Bedane: I think the prerequisites of starting a business are self-reliance, vision and an unwavering spirit of work. After that, I'd say a person must identify gaps in the marketplace, work effectively with customers, promote the product, be adaptable and take quality issues seriously. One can begin small and transform the business to a big industry.

In my country, [government delays, high taxes, favoritism are all obstacles]. Corruption and mismanagement are rampant. However, one needs to follow his ways and means to overcome these problems. I believe perseverance will lead one to triumph.

Lastly, the support from and experience exchange made possible by YALI will help Africans have better lives. Your continued support to young people of real dreams will help us Africans to stride to a bright future.

Taking Charge by Networking

One of the most effective ways to learn is to watch an expert perform a task and then try it yourself. Building a network of experts in fields that interest you will allow you to do that and can help you take charge of your career. You can use a network to explore careers, connect to the job markets, promote yourself and find career support.

Credit: AP Images



Starting a network requires you to:

1. Clarify the interests and commitments in which you are significantly involved. This may be professional fields, areas of knowledge, or issues you have been involved with and want to share.
2. Plan a communication strategy and know what to say when you meet someone new. Practice talking with people you have never talked to before. When you are at conferences or other meetings, make it a habit to introduce yourself to others and find common interests with the people you meet. If this is difficult for you, watch people you know who are better at meeting others, listen to what they say and then try it yourself.

Building your network happens in many ways. Some ideas include:

1. Develop your online professional profile through the networking site [LinkedIn](#) and join the YALI Network group to meet other young professionals in Africa who share your areas of interest.
2. Organize a [YALI Network face2face](#) gathering of people you know and ask them to invite their contacts whom you would like to know in your community.
3. Make contact with people you would like to include in your network by introducing yourself to them in person, by phone or by letter or email. You can also request an informational interview to learn about what they do.
4. Keep up-to-date with people in your professional community. Include in your network people whom you have identified as individuals it might be useful to know. These can be people inside or outside of your organization. Others may refer people to you whom they consider as likely to fit into your network.

Remember to follow up on your interactions with people in your network with notes thanking them for their time and keeping them informed of your status. Demonstrate that you are genuinely grateful for the conversation and explain how the conversation topic relates to your work. Genuineness and transparency are essential to success in any network relationship.

You also may be interested in [YALI Network and Meetup Everywhere](#) and [Signing On, Linking In](#) on yali.state.gov.
